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CONTINUING

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WE are accustomed to say that one's study of the Bible must be shaped by the point of view which he has in mind.

*POINTS OF
VIEW IN
BIBLE STUDY*

For every point of view, we are told, there must be a method of study. The Bible is a collection of books intended not only to reach many different personalities, but also to accomplish many different results. One's method of study must be determined, therefore, by the result which he is seeking to secure. We have asked ourselves whether this conception is really correct. Would such a principle, if we may so designate it, apply to any other subject of study? Is there a different kind of preparatory work for every specific application which is to be made of mathematics? May it not be true that right here we shall be able to find a mistake in the common treatment of this question, which will account largely for the lack of unity in the many honest efforts put forth to secure a working knowledge of biblical truth?

THE active Christian worker, whose soul is filled with a desire to turn men to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, finds his best help

*VARIOUS KINDS
OF STUDY*

in the appropriate use of Scripture texts. He therefore studies the Bible in order to equip himself with those utterances which, when quoted, will enable him to accomplish, to the best advantage, the hand-to-hand work on the street or in the inquiry-room. His work is

practical. His study of the Bible he calls a *practical* study. The child of God, weary with the burdens of life, desiring comfort and help, knows that these may be obtained in the pages of Sacred Scripture. With calm assurance these pages are opened and read. That which was sought, encouragement and assistance, are obtained. This is called the *devotional* use of the Bible. The teacher appointed to convey to his fellowmen systematic information concerning the Bible and its doctrines, searches on every side for that special utterance of God himself, or of Jesus Christ, or of the prophet or apostle, which, properly interpreted, will support and enforce a particular teaching. In this case the Bible is studied from the *theological* point of view. The student in literature soon learns that nowhere in ancient or modern text may he find more beautiful expressions of sincere thought and feeling than those to which the poets, prophets, and apostles of old gave utterance. He examines these pieces of literature as works of art, for indeed they are such. This is called the *literary* study of the Bible. There are others who examine this same wonderful collection of literature not from the standpoint of the artistic expression of the soul's feelings, but from that of style and vocabulary, with a view to comparison with earlier or later productions, in order to study the development of linguistic expression. We think of this as the *philological* study of the Scriptures. Moreover, there are those who study the Bible as history. They find in it the record of the growth and development of great religious ideas; ideas which are found nowhere else, and which had their origin in connection with one or another of a series of historical events. This history, touching as it does the history of every important nation which has lived its life in the world, seems in some strange way to have been controlled and regulated in order that out of it and by means of it great truths should gradually be made known. The history and the truth seem to be inseparable, and in a study of one the other also is studied. Such work is generally classified as the *historical* study of the Bible. Still other kinds of Bible study might be designated. These, however, will suffice. The question is, Are these distinct one from another? Is it

necessary, in the nature of the case, to approach the Bible in these different ways, or is it possible that one or more of these methods is fundamental? Will a real and satisfactory study include all? Let us consider this question in detail.

To make the best practical use of the Bible in work with those whose minds are not turned towards God, a verse, or collection of verses quoted indiscriminately will, in the great majority of cases, fail to accomplish the end desired. The exception to this statement is rare.

**PRACTICAL AND
DEVOTIONAL
STUDY**

One need only think for a moment in order to realize that mere words, without frame-work of history or background of philosophic statement, are valueless. This does not, however, mean that the person addressed is familiar with the historical frame-work, or with the philosophical statement; but it must be remembered that the human mind works in accordance with great laws established by the Creator of the mind. In order, therefore, to be practical in the best sense of that word, in order to be carried out practically in the lives of men, whether before or after conversion, this precious word must be viewed as a message of comfort and guidance. It will also be found that it must accord with the great plan of God for man's deliverance—a plan as rigid and systematic as any law of nature, and that, as the heart of man has been prone through all the ages to express itself in forms of art and literature, this same human heart when guided by God will find its purest expression in the same forms. It follows that a study of these utterances as connected with a plan and as works of art will carry us back most closely to the hearts which first gave them form, and consequently very close to the God who inspired them in the hearts of men. Nor should the practical student ignore linguistic study. If, as he believes, these utterances are the utterances of God, if they are the best expression of God's will possible in language; if language is capable of expressing the finer shades of thought, and if the use and arrangement of particular words determine in large measure the sense and significance of the entire passage, surely the most critical philological study of the

sacred word will have the most practical results. Most practical of all, however, is the *historical* study. The edge of truth often proclaimed becomes dull. The abstract statement of thought does not touch the average mind. For a better understanding of a given utterance on the part of him who preaches, and for a more efficient use of that utterance, nothing is so helpful as a knowledge of the historical circumstances out of which, and in connection with which the utterance was made. Many a lifeless presentation of truth would be made vivid and forceful by the introduction of the historical element. Just as truly as it was necessary for God himself through the historical event to reveal the truth, so it is necessary for the teacher or preacher by the use of the historical background to proclaim the truth. This statement applies likewise to the devotional use of scripture. The Bible is the source of spiritual help because in it are recorded the experiences of God's children. *Life contains no trial of which the Bible lacks a record.* Does one who has been greatly blessed by God and is seeking for some inspired expression of gratitude for the blessing, find satisfaction in reading a penitential psalm? In order to bring one's self into spiritual harmony with a particular passage, there must be harmony, likewise, between the situation of the worshiper, and the situation of the inspired writer. How may this be ascertained except by a study which shall acquaint one with the many possible historical situations from which have come inspired utterances? Yet all such study is, in the truest sense, *historical* study, although the individual may not have been conscious of the fact.

BUT how is it with the theological and literary use of the Bible? Do these stand alone? A successful study or teaching of the doctrines of scripture will be measured by the adaptation of the results to the wants of humanity. A theological statement which does not fit into the facts of human nature, and which does not result in the uplifting of humanity, must be defective. By this we do not mean to contend that a statement must be tested by the way in

THEOLOGICAL
AND LITERARY
STUDY

which it satisfies the mind of the average man. However deeply philosophical, it must be practical, and capable of practical application. However abstract, it must include the experience of the human heart in its struggles and in its sufferings. On the other hand, in any study which is so dependent upon correct expression as is the theological study of the Scriptures the painstaking work of the philologist must be fundamental. It is also true that if theological statement is the systematic formulation of truth concerning God, if mankind has come to know God gradually from century to century, if God has seen fit to reveal his attributes, that is himself, in events of history as interpreted by prophet and apostle, in the history of the chosen people and in the history of the Christ himself, how can there be theological study worthy of the name which is not, from its beginning to its close, historical study.

The position taken may not seem so clear in the case of the literary study of the Bible, and yet is anything more practical than art, whether its form be painting, music, or literature? Is anything more tangible, more real? Is it not the very embodiment of the inner soul, as that soul interprets itself to God and man? If life is real and practical, and if a literature is the expression of true life, and thought, then a literary study of the Bible which does not have a practical end and which does not attain practical results is not true study. If in the purest and truest literature the soul expresses its experience and its aspirations under varied circumstances, how can the literary study of the Bible, if properly conducted, be other than devotional? We have as little sympathy with those who would cut asunder literature and history as with those who ignore the historical element in theology. The great literatures are but the expression of thought moulded and influenced by history, although we must remember that there is a history of the individual as well as of the nation, a history of the soul, subjective, as well as a history of the man, objective. The niceties of David's lyrics are best appreciated by those who know David's life. The depths of Job's utterances can be well understood only by those who appreciate the sufferings of the exile which called them forth.

BUT surely it can be said that the linguistic and the historical points of view in Bible study are independent of all others. Yet *is this true?* It is possible for one to engage in the *LINGUISTIC AND HISTORICAL STUDY* philological study of a word, or expression, without regard to the use which shall be made of the results of such study. It is possible that one may investigate the details of an historical event without a thought of using in any way the results of the investigation. This, we say, is possible. Is it probable? We are sometimes urged to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; truth for the sake of truth, without reference to anything of a utilitarian character. This is an ideal position. Is it a correct ideal? As a matter of fact, the purpose of every sincere man, in his work as philologist or historian, is to ascertain truth, because truth, whether old truth in new dress, or new truth, will affect thought, and thought will enter into life and character. Philological and historical study, as such, mean nothing. It is only as they are conducted, in order to secure practical ends; in order to reproduce exactly the thoughts and experience of God's servants of old, that God's servants of the present day may use them as the expression of their own thought and experience; in order to present the reflection of the divinity which that divinity itself projected; in order to present vividly and intelligibly the word-pictures of the world's greatest artists,—it is only, we say, when used for such purposes that they are prosecuted worthily. Are they then in any true sense independent?

IN conclusion, it would seem that these so-called points of view for approach to the Bible are interrelated in every possible way. Do they sustain any relationship to each other? Is there after all real logic in this apparently superficial arrangement of these various *INTERRELATION OF VARIOUS KINDS OF STUDY* methods of approach? Does not a closer study reveal two facts: (1) that any true Bible study will include all; that, indeed, instead of being different points of view from which to approach the Bible, they constitute a series of steps, one rising above the other? And when regarded closely, these

are not steps toward the Bible, but steps forward, which the child of God may take with the Bible in his hand and in his heart; which, indeed, he must take, consciously or unconsciously, for the highest fulfilment of the obligations which an acceptance of the Christian faith involves. (2) That these steps are to be taken in the reverse way, two by two, beginning with the historical and critical study, for these are the foundation. In proportion as this work is done thoroughly, that which remains may be performed faithfully. There follow the literary and theological, and then, last of all, the devotional and practical.

One word more. Do we mean to say that there can be no *devotional* or *practical* use of Scripture unless such use be preceded by the others named? No. God in his goodness often makes it possible for those who have yielded to the influence of the Holy Spirit, as it were by instinct, to understand the use of the divine utterance. This, however, does not relieve them from the responsibility of such historical and critical, such literary and theological study, as may be within their reach. If, however, men's minds were given by God to be used; if intelligence counts for anything, there is incumbent upon us an *intelligent* study of the Bible, that is, a study which makes one intelligent in respect to the history back of the utterances, the exact meaning of the utterances, the full force of the ideal sought to be conveyed, and the great plan of God in accordance with which all of it was given. And besides, it is reasonable to suppose that in this field, as well as in other fields, the well-equipped mind is capable of more keenly appreciating thought, whether human or divine, and of using such thought to the greatest possible advantage.